Projected Worlds:
Data, Digitisation and Decision

Across multiple domains of life – tracking terrorist finance, screening airline passengers, mapping risk or hazard, preparing for emergencies – novel forms of digitised data are becoming central to the enactment of decisions. From juridical decisions about potential future security risks, to the sovereign sifting of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ forms of circulation at borders, data are rendered a means of visualising and governing subjects, populations and futures. The emergence of contemporary techniques of data mining, visual analytics, social network analysis and pre-emptive profiling poses important questions: What kind of picture of a person or object is created via new data forms? How are conventional scientific and legal understandings of causality and evidence challenged by mosaic correlations of data? What is the potential to speak back to the projected world that emerges through techniques of profiling, mapping, scoring and visualising?

The Projected Worlds workshop follows on from the Data Wars project (Durham University, University of Amsterdam), which has traced pre-emptive security decisions such as asset freezing and detention through the codes, protocols and algorithms that visualise an uncertain future. The workshop will create an opportunity to ‘think data differently’: participants from advocacy, academic and civil society backgrounds will engage the problem of how new data forms shape the landscape of decision in the contemporary world, and the effects of these decisions on people’s lives.

Data Wars: Risk, Governance and Mobility in the European War on Terror

Data Wars is a three-year research project which analyses the ways in which the mobility of people and the mobility of money are being governed in the war on terror. The project aims to understand how commercial data – including financial records and passenger information – become used for security decisions in Europe. The efficient, expert mining of data is thought to be key in locating and intervening in future risk. Personal data which is retained within state and commercial fields (such as financial transactions, airline passenger records, welfare and social security information) are being brought together and analysed through risk-based calculative models in order to flag potentially ‘suspicous’ or ‘unusual’ action. At the same time, technical expertise from the commercial sector is becoming integrated into forms of governance that emphasise risk management. The transformation of data into intelligence (upon which security decisions are made) occurs within a growing field of practices, knowledge economies and alliances that is drawing increased interest from scholars and experts.

The Data Wars project has teams at the University of Amsterdam, Netherlands and Durham University, UK and is funded under the ESRC - NWO bilateral agreement. See www.datawars.org.
Workshop Programme
Thursday 3 November
Digital Lounge, Tyneside Cinema
10.00 Welcome and introduction
Marieke de Goede (University of Amsterdam)
Haroun Atallah (Islamic Relief)
Ben Hayes (Statewatch)
11.45 Coffee
12.00-13.30 Panel Two. Anticipatory Profiles and Preemptive Prosecution
Beatrice de Graaf (Leiden University)
Jan Permon (Progress Lawyers Network)
Martijn van Otterlo (Radboud University)
13.30 Lunch
Frances Webber (Garden Court Chambers)
Louise Amoore (Durham University)
Alice Wyss (Amnesty International)
17.00-19.30 Film Screening of Secrecy (Peter Galison, Robb Moss) at The Roxy, Tyneside Cinema
Followed by a roundtable discussion.

Friday 4 November
Digital Lounge, Tyneside Cinema
9.30-11.00 Keynote
Jenny Edkins (Aberystwyth University)
Missing the Person
11.00 Coffee
11.15 - 12.45 Panel Four. Forensic Futures: Projection and Bodies of Evidence
Amade M’Charek (University of Amsterdam)
Irmia van der Ploeg (Zuyd University and DigIdeas)
Marwan Muhammad (www.foulexpress.com)
12.45-13.00 Concluding Plenary Discussion
13.00 Lunch and Depart

We live in a world where the production of secret knowledge dwarfs the production of open knowledge. Depending on whom you ask, government secrecy is either the key to victory in our struggle against terrorism, or our Achilles heel. But is so much secrecy a bad thing?

Secrecy is about the vast, invisible world of government secrecy. By focusing on classified secrets, the government’s ability to put information out of sight if it would harm national security, Secrecy explores the tensions between our safety as a nation, and our ability to function as a democracy.